

Cliffnotes, June 2, 2000

by Chance

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For AT. As always I miss you.

"But Da-ad," Twelve year old Robert Bridger whined, "you didn't say Aunt Denise was coming."

Nathan Bridger, father to the whining boy closed his eyes and sighed. He didn't like his wife's sister anymore then Robert did, but Carol would kill him if he encouraged their children to show anything less then respect for the woman.

It wasn't that she wasn't a nice person, she usually bent over backwards to try and help everyone. She'd come to stay with them for a few weeks right after Robert's birth and she was always willing to drop everything at a moment's notice when asked, but she had this annoying habit....

"She's gonna call my Bobby-O Dad! I hate it when she does that. It's _embarrassing_," Robert stressed the last word, lowering his voice to make sure no one overheard them.

Nathan sighed again and, steering his oldest child to the outside deck, tried to think of some way to diffuse the situation.

The Bridger family was having a reunion of sorts to celebrate the newest member of the clan. It was basically an excuse for all the relatives to come over and get a glimpse of Lucas James, as he had been named just ten days before. People from all over the state, and a few from clear across the country had come to say a quick hello to the little boy. While this was a good thing, there were people Nathan had missed seeing, it also brought some of the "other" relatives. The ones he chose to avoid if he could do it without being rude.

Unfortunately there was no way to avoid Aunt Denise in their own house. They were just going to have to deal with it.

"Robbie," Nathan began turning toward his oldest child. The older man had to bite back a grin at the site before him. Robert was standing, legs slightly apart and arms akimbo. His lower lip jutted out in a pout and his eyes were squinted slightly against the glare of the hot sun. The almost teenager, who fought so hard to be "adult" looked no more then six years old at the moment, but Nathan would gladly die before telling him.

"I know Aunt Denise can be a little...much, but she's your mother's sister and loves you very much." Nathan held up his hand as Robert opened his mouth to interrupt. "Let me finish. I know you hate it when she calls you Bobby-O. I'm not exactly thrilled when she calls me Natey either, but she's family and we'll just have to put up with it. Let's do it for you mom, okay?" Robert sighed and nodded, his arms coming down to rest at his sides.

"Okay Dad, I'll do it for Mom," he said, preceding Nathan into the house, "but what are we gonna do about Lucas?"

"What do you mean?" Nathan asked quizzically. As far as he knew there was nothing that needed to be "done" about Lucas.

"C'mon Dad," Robert answered, using that voice that only children have. The tone that could make any rational, intelligent adult feel

about as smart as a post. "You know Aunt Denise is going to give him a stupid nickname. How're we gonna stop it?"

Nathan bit back another smile. Since Robert had found out he was going to be a big brother, both Nathan and Carol had noticed a protective streak come out in their oldest child whenever Lucas was brought up, and it had only increased since the actual birth. Right now Robert was clearly trying to protect his little brother from what he viewed as the family curse: Aunt Denise's nicknames.

"Well," Nathan said slowly, giving the matter some serious thought. He'd been too late to stop "Bobby-O," if he could do anything to stop Aunt Denise from continuing her reign of terror he would. "How do you think we could stop her from giving Lucas a nickname?"

Robert thought hard, his brow furrowing in concentration. By this time they'd reached the main family room where most of the people has congregated. There, sitting in a rocking chair placed in front of the front window sat Carol holding a blanket wrapped bundle in her arms. From the hallway Nathan could see a small, pink hand reaching out and waving around in the air, drawing a wave of laughter from the surrounding group.

"I don't know," Robert said finally, shoulders slumping dejectedly. Nathan wrapped an arm around his shoulders and squeezed.

"Don't worry Robbie, we'll think of something."

An hour later Robert and Nathan had relieved Carol, taking Lucas from her tired arms and giving her some time to circulate. Carol's father hailed Nathan from across the room and the harried father handed Lucas over to Robert, excusing himself for just a few minutes.

"Well, looks like its just you and me, Lucas," Robert said looking down into the gurgling infant's face. Lucas smiled up at him, bright blue eyes shining happily. Carol had told him that Lucas was still too small to really smile yet and that when he did that it was most likely gas, but Robert didn't buy it. He knew Lucas knew who he was and reserved his real smiles just for him. "Don't worry, I'll 'protect' you from Aunt Denise...and everything else."

He was sitting, playing with his little brother, trying to get that smile to come back when a shadow fell over them. Robert looked up and caught sight of Aunt Denise just before she swooped down and took Lucas from his arms. Lucas gave a cry of surprise and fussed a little, not recognizing who had him. Robert stood up immediately and tried to let Lucas see him, knowing from experience that Aunt Denise wasn't about to put Lucas down anytime soon. She always glommed onto the babies first, holding them until their parents almost had to wrestle them from her.

"And who is this charming young man Bobby-O," she asked, her bright red lips smacking on the "b." Robert fought the urge to step back out of spit range but glanced at his little brother and stood his ground. "How does it feel to be a big brother, Bobby-O?"

"It's great," he forced out trying to overlook the "Bobby-O" thing.

"I think my mom needs to feed him though so I'll just take him over to her." He reached for Lucas and succeeded in releasing the baby from the over exuberant lady's clutches.

"Okay then Bobby-O, you be a good boy and take care of little Lulie for me," Robert cringed at the name.

'Damn, too late,' he thought. Suddenly, like the sun coming out on a cloudy day, the idea that would save Lucas came to his mind. He smiled slyly before looking up at Aunt Denise.

"Don't worry Aunt Denise," he said sweetly, "I always take good care of Little J." He paused and waited for her reaction.

"Little J," she asked, her eyes lighting up. "Oh I like that very much, how did you come up with it?"

"Uh-" Robert began trying to think quickly. He felt a warm hand settle on his shoulder.

"His middle name is James," Nathan said coming to his son's rescue. "So it just kind of...came from that." He smiled down at Robert, winking conspiratorially. Leave it to a protective big brother to come up with the solution to a problem that had plagued the family for at least the last twenty-five years. Give the kid a nickname first before Denise could get to it.

Father and son smiled at each other. Finally, Aunt Denise's reign of terror was coming to an end.

End
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